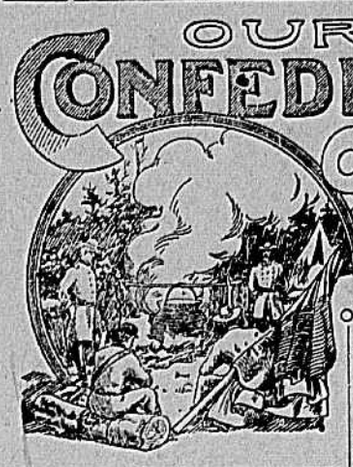
OUR CONFEDERATE COLUMN



"Our Little Confederate"

MEMPHIS, TENN., June 5.—This story was related by a Federal soldier on October 6, 1889, and I thought so much of it that I have preserved it for twenty years.

Thinking the Southern boys of today would be interested in reading of the heroism of the Confederate boys of 1861 to 1865 who participated in the great Civil War, and who made the most gallant and bravest soldiers in the army, I have written the story, and I trust that it may be read by the boys and the old soldiers, especially by those who participated in that desperate and disastrous battle at Malvern Hill.

No doubt a few of them will be here enjoying the reunion. They well remember the charge made on Malvern Hill, through the open field on the Crews farm forty-seven years ago, which resulted so disastrously to the Confederate army that day.

Papers found on the little boy's person after death disclosed his identity as Henry Thorton.

W. J. BOOKER.

"OUR LITTLE CONFEDERATE."

The Boy Who Reached the Federal Line at Malvern Hill.

When the Confederates came swarming across the Crews farm to reach us on Malvern Hill, said a Federal soldier who participated in this desperate battle, we knew they were coming to death and defeat. We had been driven back from Chickahominy step by step and day by day, fighting fierce battles at every rallying point, but this was the end. Malvern Hill, crowned with troops and bristling with cannon, was impregnable. I was posted on the point looking towards the Crews house in the dry bed of a creek. It was a capital rifle pit, and we were packed in there so thick that we scarcely had elbow room. As the legions in gray attacked our rapid fire, assisted by the batteries above us, was enough to demoralize the lines without the infantry, higher up, firing a gun.

Magruder must have been insane that afternoon to send his men to their death across that opening as he did. We could see them come out of the forest in splendid formation, and as they got the order to advance their step was like clockwork. There was a meadow with hardly a stump in it stretching away before us for half a mile, and the Confederates hadn't the slightest cover. Being so low down we could see under the smoke, and it was enough to make your flesh creep to see the havoc worked by our shell before the lines got within musket range. The man on my left laid down his musket and prayed God that the Confederates would go back and thus put an end to the horrible work. Then when they pushed on and got within range there was a flame all along our mile front—flame after flame—and not a Confederate got within a stone's throw.

The last charge, made just at twilight, was the most desperate of all. The lines started with a yell and charged on the run, and though hundreds went down, other hundreds kept on. We scattered and scorched and withered them with our musketry fire, and I finally heard them sound "retreat." We sprang up, gave them a last volley, and then dashed forward a few rods with the bayonet. Out of the smoke and darkness suddenly appeared a figure in my front. There was a whiz-z-z! and the butt of a musket just cleared my head and knocked the man on my left flat to the earth. I had my musket at a charge, when a voice called out: "Hold on, I surrender!"

I went forward and took hold of him, and who or what do you suppose he suppose he was? A boy not yet fifteen years old, and as pale-faced, as gentle-spoken as a girl. More than that, he was wounded in the side, in the leg and in the head. We had them driven back to stay, and our boys were cheering and yelling, and I took the boy on my back and carried him beyond the creek and into our lines. He must have been suffering painfully from his wounds, but he never uttered a groan. I heaped two or three blankets together and made him a bed, but I could get no one to do for him. There were dead and wounded men almost without number around us, and that last desperate charge had hardly been driven back before McClellan issued his orders to fall back to the river under cover of the gunboats. As my brigade was nearest to the Confederates we were the last to move, and it was long after midnight before we got the word.

Meanwhile I had inspected the boy's wounds and soothed him as best I could. It was plain that he was fatally hit, and when he realized this he said:

"I—I don't care for myself, but mother—poor old mother! And sister Mary—and little Jim—it will break their hearts."

By and by he fell into a sort of stupor that lasted for a quarter of an hour. Then he roused himself and exclaimed:

"It was a glorious charge! We knew that we were going to death, but never a man hung back—never a man lost his step! Were they driven back?"

"Yes."

"But we reached your lines?"

"Yes, a few."

"And I was one?"

"Yes, poor boy; never a one came nearer than you."

"That's grand! They said I would be afraid, but I wasn't; I didn't feel it when I was hit. We were on the double-quick. I was cheering, Hurray! Hurray! Hurray."

Half an hour later he was dead. There were three of us bending over him when he suddenly sat up, waived his arm and sought to cheer again, but the blood choked him and he fell back dead.

Twenty long years after, one day in a Georgia farmhouse, I found his mother, old, bent and gray, and little Jim, now grown to manhood, and his sister Mary, now a woman, wife and mother. They knew he fell at Malvern Hill, but he had been buried among the unknown, and how he died they knew not.

Colonel Dahlgren's Whereabouts Just Before His Raid.

Referring to the articles which appeared recently in the Confederate Column, in regard to Colonial Ulric Dahlgren's being a spy in Richmond shortly before the famous "Dahlgren raid," General George W. Davis, of the United States Army, writes to us that "as respects the whereabouts of Colonel Dahlgren shortly before the raid I find that in the fall and winter of 1863-1864 he spent several weeks while convalescing from his wound—loss of his foot—with his father, Admiral Dahlgren, who then commanded the blockade off Charleston, S. C. Colonel Dahlgren arrived in Washington from Charleston on January 24, 1864, and went down to the Rapidan to join the army on February 18 following. Kilpatrick, with Dahlgren, started on the raid on February 28, so if the colonel was acting the spy in Richmond and in Hanover it must have been between February 18 and February 28. He was in Washington all the time between the date of his arrival there from Charleston and the time he left to join the army on the Rapidan."

It will be remembered that the editor of the Confederate Column did not credit the romantic story when it was published.

R. W. H.

A Letter to New York Evening Post.

The following letter to the New York Evening Post from our friend, Colonel W. O. Skelton, has not yet appeared in that paper. It does seem remarkable that a newspaper of the Post's conceded ability and influence should at this late day be so narrow and bigoted as to speak of President Davis as a "traitor and rebel." This is an indictment of the entire Southern people, who elected him as their representative, and is maliciously offensive and insulting. It is absurdly false and nonsensical to speak of "the national belief that Jefferson Davis's cause was morally wrong." If the South is now a part of the nation—and certainly there has been no change in the sentiment of its people on this point—they are as truly convinced now that their cause was just and righteous as when they took up arms in its defense. And this belief is not at all inconsistent with their present feeling of loyalty to the United States. None but idiots think that might makes right. Carlisle said: "Show me the man you honor; I know by the symptom, better than by any other, what kind of man you yourself are." The South is content that history shall decide the righteousness of its cause by the characters and lives of the opposing leaders in the great war of 1861-1865. Let such Ephraims as Hollingsworth, of Ohio, and the Evening Post remain joined to their idols .We may smile, but do not question their right.

R. W. H.

Here is Colonel Skelton's Letter.

'May 24.

Editor Evening Post:

I read with interest your editorial of May 21, and your conclusion reminded me of a woman's letter—the postscript is the most important part! Why can't you learn history and forget the bitterness of the Reconstruction period? Why should you make a spectacle of yourself in this enlightened age by speaking of President Jefferson Davis as a "defeated traitor and a rebel?" Are you a better constitutional lawyer than Chief Justice Chase, who sustained the demurrer to the indictment against President Davis in the United States court here in 1867?

If you will take the trouble to read "Men and Measures of a Half Century," by Hon. Hugh McCulloch, you can see a full account of the reasons which made President Andrew Johnson and his Cabinet afraid to appeal this case to the Supreme Court of the United States. Why continue to be so intellectually blind and bigoted as not to admit, with all broad-minded and cultured people, that the South was morally and constitutionally right in the War of Secession? That the North was right from a mercenary and commercial standpoint you can find by reference to the views of Hon. Henry Cabot Lodge in his "Life of Daniel Webster," and his comments on the debate between Hayne and Webster.

Yours truly,

W. O. SKELTON.

Work of the Ordnance Bureau of the War Department of the Confederate States, 1861—1865

By J. W. MALLET,
Ex-Lieutenant-Colonel of Artillery and Superintendent of Confederate States' Ordnance Laboratories.

(Continued From Last Sunday.)

NUMBER TWO.

In 1861 the Southern States were almost wholly occupied with agricultural pursuits, and their resources immediately available in the way of manufacturing establishments were poor indeed. There were two small private powder mills in Tennessee, two in South Carolina, one in North Carolina, and a little stamping mill in New Orleans. There were but two first-class foundries and machine shops—the Tredegar Iron Works, at Richmond, and the Leeds Foundry, at New Orleans. The loss of the latter was one of the sorest consequences of the fall of that city. There were several fairly respectable machine shops of the second class. There were woolen mills, in Virginia, notably the Crenshaw Mills, at Richmond, and several cotton mills, turning out coarse cloth, which, however, proved of enormous value, two of the largest being at Augusta and Macon. There were twenty paper mills, for the most part small, of which eight were in North Carolina and five in South Carolina. There were small iron furnaces and forges in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama, but the production of iron by these was very meagre.

There had been recently established at Ducktown, Tenn., the smelting and rolling of copper, though upon no great scale, and some lead was being produced from the ore of Wytheville, Va. There were, of course, numerous carpenters' and blacksmiths' shops, and there were a very moderate number of tanneries. Coal was mined chiefly in Virginia, the Cumberland field of Tennessee, and in Alabama, and as yet upon no great scale. Skilled mechanics were scarce, and of those in the country a good many had come from Northern States and returned thither when actual hostilities began.

As the war went on the newly organized arsenals and ordnance shops, in addition to their task of producing new munitions of war, had to do an immense amount of work in repairing arms sent in from the field and utilizing material captured or gleaned from the battlefields. Arrangements were made with the field ordnance officers for the collection of such material, and very large lots of lead, shot and shell, infantry and artillery ammunition, etc., were thus secured. The small arms from the fields of the Seven Days' battles below Richmond and the second battle of Manassas, and from the capture of Harper's Ferry by General Jackson were, in 1862, of immense value.

In the scramble of the early part of the war to obtain at once arms of some kind, both at home and abroad, a most heterogeneous collection was gathered. There were in the hands of the troops Springfield and Enfield muskets, Mississippi and Maynard rifles, Hall's and Sharp's carbines, and arms of English, German, Austrian and Belgian manufacture, of many different calibres. I had at one time samples of more than twenty patterns of infantry weapons alone. Much the same state of things existed as to artillery, both seacoast and field guns. As an illustration, I may mention that when I joined General R. E. Rodes's brigade for field service, the battery of Captain (afterwards colonel) Thos. H. Carter, which was attached to the brigade, had a scratch lot of guns consisting of two smooth-bore six-pounder, one twelve-pounder howitzer—these all of bronze—and one three-inch iron rifle. As a natural consequence, there was serious trouble at the arsenals and in the field from confusion in regard to ammunition—trouble which was made worse by the gauges in use in the ordnance shops, which were not very accurate and often did not agree among themselves.

This fact primarily led to my becoming connected with the ordnance corps. I was in the summer of 1862 serving most pleasantly as aide-de-camp on the staff of General Rodes, whom I had known well before the war. Another friend of his was Colonel Briscoe Baldwin, chief ordnance officer on the staff of General Lee, and who had been for a while in charge of the Richmond arsenal. Colonel Baldwin visited our camp below Richmond at the time of the battle of Seven Pines, talked with me about the state of the ordnance service, and asked me to go with him to the office in Richmond of Colonel Gorgas, who had expressed a wish to see me. The result of several interviews with him was that I was, though with a good deal of reluctance, transferred to the Ordnance Corps, with a commission as captain of artillery, and ordered to at once endeavor to bring order out of the confusion that had been referred to. In August and September I made a visit to all the principal ordnance establishments, conferred with the chief field ordnance officers, and drew up a report, with recommendations for rules to be observed, which was submitted to Colonel Gorgas, approved by him, and ordered to be printed and distributed. Orders were sent to Europe for a number of accurately tested steel gauges.

Under orders from Colonel Gorgas, I prepared the plans and preliminary drawings for the Central Ordnance Laboratory, which has been already mentioned. My instructions were then to make my headquarters at Macon, reporting directly to the chief of ordnance at Richmond; to set about the construction of the central laboratory, and, with an assistant officer and a military storekeeper, to supervise the erection of the buildings and prepare the specifications for the machinery; but also to personally visit at frequent intervals all the important arsenals, the headquarters of the principal armies in the field and the chief fortified seaports, in order to harmonize and improve the work being done, and by reports to the chief of ordnance to keep him informed of the relations of the different parts of the work. My original orders required that these visits should be made once a month to each point, but it was quite impossible to literally accomplish this, and I was often directed specifically to go to this or that point where some particular trouble had arisen.

Thus I was several times ordered to go to Charleston during the height of the siege in 1863 to look into complaints as to the burning of time fuses and injury from dampness to ammunition in the bomb-proof magazines of Fort Sumter and on Morris and Sullivan's Islands. Some of the most striking pictures of the war which my memory preserves are of scenes beheld during these visits, as, for instance, the suffocating interior of the sand-bag bomb-proofs of Battery Wagner, on Morris Island, and the assault of this work on the 18th of July, 1863; the skirmishing in front of Rocky Face Ridge of General Johnston's army in May, 1864, at the opening of the campaign from Dalton to Atlanta; and the Army of Northern Virginia just after it had taken position in front of Petersburg in July, 1864, after the memorable campaign of the Wilderness, when I saw for the last time my well and affectionately remembered chief, General Rodes, killed in the following September at Winchester.

During the Civil War of 1861 the armament and warlike munitions of the world were very different from and much simpler than those of the present day.

Armor-clad vessels and torpedoes had been experimented with, gun-cotton and nitroglycerin were known, but not in practical use, rifled cannon were being rapidly improved and brought into service, but there were no "machine guns" and there was as yet very little use made of waterproof metallic cartridge cases for small-arms; the main reliance was on gunpowder as the only explosive, muzzle-loading artillery and hand-rifles, paper cartridges and separate percussion caps.

To produce on a large scale even such equipment as this involved in the Southern States, shut out from free commerce with the rest of the world, most formidable difficulties arising from dearth of materials, machinery and skilled labor. As regards the materials for making gunpowder, search was made for nitre earth, and considerable quantities were obtained from caves in Tennessee, Georgia and North Alabama, as also from old buildings, cellars, plantation quarters and tobacco barns. Colonel I. M. St. John was, in 1862, given separate charge of this work, and developed it systematically on a large scale.

He also established artificial "nitre beds" at Columbia and Charleston, S. C.; Augusta and Savannah, Ga.; Selma and Mobile, Ala., and elsewhere. The end of the war had come before these beds had become "ripe" enough to be leached, but it was estimated that by that time they already contained some three or four million pounds of saltpetre. In fact, much the larger part of the nitre used at the Augusta powder mill came in through the blockade. Sulphur was early secured, as there were found at New Orleans several hundred tons intended for use in sugar-making. For the third ingredient of powder, namely charcoal, recourse was had chiefly to cottonwood (mainly populus heterophylla) from the banks of the Savannah River. It was abundant, and gave an excellent product. Lead was obtained from the ore fo Wythe county, Va., from the gleanings of the battlefields, and quite largely from the collection throughout the country of window-weights, lead-pipe, cistern linings, etc. Small lead smelting works were set up at Petersburg, Va., and under the direction of Dr. Piggott, formerly of Baltimore, not only was the ore from Wythe county and a few other points reduced, but even some progress was made in desilverization by the Pattinson process, several tons of enriched lead being set aside, which, however, before cupellation, had to be sent as bullets to the field under one of the sudden urgent demands for ammunition. Much lead was also brought from abroad through the blockade.

A moderate amount of sheet copper was found at Cleveland, Tenn., produced from the Ducktown ore, but later recourse was had for making percussion caps and friction primers to the turpentine stills scattered through the pine forests of North and South Carolina.

Really important results were produced in 1862 and 1863 in the development of the iron ores of the country, particularly in Alabama, unconsciously laying the foundation for this great industry as it now exists. The Nitre and Mining Bureau, under Colonel St. John, partly by its own officers and partly through contractors, opened mines, erected furnaces and rolling mills, and turned out large quantities of iron of superior quality. But before this work had got well under way much care was taken in the collection of shot and shell and of scrap iron of all kinds. During the bombardment of Charleston, as a heavy Parrott shell came down, the little street urchins were to be seen ready for a rush to claim it, or its fragments if it burst, in order to claim payment for the iron at the arsenal.

Much ingenuity was shown by a few skilled mechanics in constructing with but poor appliances special machinery for ordnance purposes, such as the rolling, punching and forming of percussion caps, the drawing of the tubes for friction primers, the "squirting" of lead rod and making pressed bullets, etc. Much labor was spent, but success never achieved in drawing the copper cylinders for small arms cartridges. Careful search for trained mechanics was made throughout the country and among the army in the field, and details for ordnance service were made on proper evidence of the value of such service, great pains being often necessary to prevent any mere evasion of military duty. Some attempts were made to import mechanics from Europe, but with practically no success. Every effort was made to convert unskilled into skilled labor by the teaching of the few who were already themselves trained.

From time to time, under stress of necessity, some poor makeshift materials had to be substituted for better ones.

At one time, for instance, the supply of nitric acid for making fulminate for caps had been exhausted, and two or three million caps had to be issued which were charged with a mixture of potassium chlorate and sulphur. These did fairly well if kept dry, but soon became untrustworthy in damp air, so that an extra number was issued with each packet of cartridges until the use of fulminate could be resumed. In view of the scarcity of leather, and almost absolute lack of india rubber, extensive use was made of heavy cotton cloth, for some purposes in double or quadruple thicknesses heavily stitched together, treated with one or more coats of drying oil. Sheets of such cloth were issued to the men in the field for sleeping on damp ground, and belts, bridle reins and cartridge boxes were made in whole or in part of the same material. Linseed oil answered best for making this cloth, and much was imported through the blockade, but it was eked out to some extent by fish oil, a fishery being established on the Cape Fear River to procure it, while the fish were in part utilized for the food of operatives.

(Concluded next Sunday.)